

# Italy *and* Jugo-Slavia

*By*  
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*Member of the Italian Parliament*



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## ITALY AND JUGO-SLAVIA

By Alceste De Ambris

Member of the Italian Parliament from Parma.

THE writer is not an enemy of the Jugo-Slavs. He always has believed, and still believes that the Slavs of the South, have, like any other people, the right to unite, and that the realization of their right may benefit the entire world, not excluding Italy, since the union of the Croats, Slovenes and Serbians will make the resurrection of Austria forever impossible, and will erect a barrier against the menace of Germany in the East of Europe.

¶ Therefore he maintains that anyone is a real enemy of peace, and is working in the interest of the Germans, who puts difficulties in the way of the necessary understanding between Italy and Jugo Slavia. It follows that the Adriatic question must be treated with calmness, and a spirit of justice, especially by the Americans who are called into the dispute almost as arbiters, without permitting themselves to be unduly influenced by the disordered clamors of those who pretend to be in the right, shouting loudly and posing as victims of injustice.

¶ It must be admitted frankly that the Italians in America certainly cannot be accused of intemperance, or astute maneuvers to defend their interests against the Jugo-Slavs. The Southern Slavs on the other hand are conducting a furious and not always sincere campaign, which has succeeded in impressing that part of the public which knows least of the real situation. It seems to me consequently that I am performing a conscientious duty in giving these facts to the American people, that they may obtain an unbiased opinion of the controversy.

## Terms of the Adriatic Problem.

¶ The Adriatic question reduced to its most concise terms is this: There is a people of about 11,000,000 distributed over the North Central and Western parts of the Balkan peninsula; and divided until now into various political groups, more or less artificial, which wants to realize its own unity as a state. Nothing could be more justifiable or less open to criticism. The groups into which these peoples are divided are the following, according to the information and statistics of the Jugo-Slav committee of Geneva:

	Inhabitants
Kingdom of Serbia.....	4,500,000
Kingdom of Montenegro .....	435,000
Bosnia and Herzegovina, (Austria).....	1,765,000
Croatia and Slavonia, (Austria).....	2,284,000
Stiria, Carniola, and Carinthia, (Austria).....	1,020,000
Hungarian Slavia.....	657,000

¶ About the rights of these peoples to form the Jugo-Slav state there can be no doubt or discussion. That is not the point. The difficulty appears when the Jugo-Slavs attempt to include in their state as well as other territories mixed populations such as Istria with Trieste, Eastern Friuli, with Gorizia, Gradisca, Fiume and the whole of Dalmatia. In these territories, the Jugo-Slavs argue, there are about a million Slovenes, and Croats. Therefore they belong to Jugo-Slavia; and Italy is committing an act of oppression and imperialism when it attempts to annex them.

## The Zones of Mixed Populations.

¶ The question of the zones with mixed populations is one of the most complex and thorny. There is no doubt that the ideal solution would consist in a League of Nations, meaning a real and true federation of states on the model of the American union. A broad federative pact among the peoples would provide the sword equal to cutting the gordian knot of all intricate political and territorial problems raised by the war. Even the most difficult problem which is that of reconciling the rights of the various nationalities in the zones of mixed population, could be solved with no great effort, once the principle of liberty and federation were applied in its entirety.



¶ There does not seem to be any doubt, in fact, that whenever diverse races living in the same territory no longer have the stimulus of interested states to push one against the other, they do not find it difficult to discover a *modus vivendi*, analogous to that which makes the existence of the Belgians possible, although divided between Walloons and Flemings; of Canada where English and French live together harmoniously without feeling an impulse to cut one another's throats; of the Swiss Confederation, which offers the significant example of cantons like that of the Grisons where 50,000 Germans, 32,000 Romansch and Ladins, and 18,000 Italians, further divided into Protestants and Catholics, live together peacefully, thanks to the recognized right of every race to preserve its own customs and language in the bosom of the political aggregation to which it belongs. This solution, however, which would seem the most radical and just, does not appear strongly to be in line for probable adoption.

### Separate Italian and Jugo Slav States.

¶ It should be regarded rather as more likely that the morrow will see an Italian state and a Jugo Slav state, not united, or federated, which will make it necessary to define a boundary between them. In this case it appears evident that no matter where the boundary line is run, part of the population of the mixed zone will find itself incorporated of necessity with a foreign country. There is no way to avoid this inconvenience, and the transfer of a territory with mixed population never can be made on a basis of absolute justice. Therefore it is necessary to be satisfied with a justice which shall be relatively fair to all, considering the compromises which can make it more acceptable.

### Elements on Which to Base a Judgment.

¶ Jugo Slavia asserts its right to Istria, to Eastern Friuli and to Dalmatia; but Italy likewise asserts its rights to this territory. We must examine their claims to determine which has the strongest grounds for support.

¶ It is necessary to reckon with diverse elements, none of which taken by itself can be decisive, although they would be

decisive considered as a whole. These factors are: 1. Population, 2. Geography, 3. History, 4. Culture, 5. Political and economical necessities.

¶ **Population.** The population of Istria and of Eastern Friuli always has been Italian in the past by a large majority. It is enough to look at any map to be convinced that the names of the cities and the villages of those regions are almost all Italian, even in the interior of the country. It is only within recent years that the Slav element has begun to have importance. It established itself in certain parts, as a voluntary immigration; and in others as an artificial influx from Austria to smother the Italian element, which never has ceased to manifest its desire to separate from the Danubian monarchy.

¶ Altogether even today the Italians are on the coast in great numbers, inhabiting the busiest and wealthiest cities. Trieste, to which Italy's claim is disputed, contained 120,000 Italians before the war, subjects of Austria; 30,000 Italians who were Italian subjects; 6,000 Slovenes and 2,000 Croats, besides 12,000 Germans. Therefore the Italians comprised more than two-thirds of the whole. In the whole of Istria the number of Italians and Jugo Slavs counter-balance, there being about 360,000 of each. The Jugo-Slavs are divided between Slovenes and Serbo-Croats.

### **Fiume Indisputably Italian.**

¶ Fiume likewise is indisputably Italian. Before the war its population was composed of 26,000 Italian subjects of Austria; 6,000 subjects of the king of Italy; 12,000 Croats and 6,000 Maygars. Therefore the Italians form 65 per cent of the population. In Zara, the capital of Dalmatia, there are 10,000 Italians and only 3,000 Croats. The population of the rest of Dalmatia instead, is Slav; but Italy asks only a small part of the coast.

¶ **Geography.** Look at a map and from that point of view it would be easy to solve the problem. All of Istria and Eastern Friuli are included within the chain of the Alps which, with the sea, mark the natural confines of Italy. The great French

geographer, Elisée Reclus, bears testimony moreover, that the whole of Istria and Eastern Friuli are absolutely Italian in orography, in hydrography, and in geology. In regard to Dalmatia there is more controversy, although authorities are not wanting who maintain the whole country belongs to Italy.

¶ **History.** The whole history of Istria, of Italian Friuli and of Dalmatia is Italian history. Rome first, and Venice afterwards civilized those regions. The cities which did not belong to the republic of Venice were free cities and ever asserted their Italian character, as for instance did Aquileia, Fiume and Trieste. The history of Trieste is, more than any other, a continuous reassertion of its Italian character—from 1167, when it took part in the Lombard league against the German Barbarossa, down to the present time.

¶ **Culture.** Wherever in Eastern Friuli, in Istria or in Dalmatia there is any trace of civility, that trace is Italian. The architecture is Italian (Roman or Venetian). The literature is Italian. The language spoken along the whole coast is Italian; the shipping is Italian and the language of commerce Italian. The Slavs themselves when they desire to take part in the life of the most polite centers are obliged to speak Italian.

### Italy's Adriatic Coast Lacks Defense.

¶ **Political and Economical Necessities.** It is an absolute necessity for Italy to have safe boundaries in the Alps and on the Adriatic sea which it should control. The Alps are the gates to Italy, and it is not possible to leave them in the hands of other peoples without being open, as in the past, to every invasion. The Adriatic is a few tens of kilometers wide, so constituted as to put Italy at the mercy of whoever holds the whole of the Eastern coast. Also in this case it is enough to look at the map to be convinced. While the coast of Italy on the Adriatic is continuous, flat, without natural harbors, and exposed to storms, the Dalmatian coast is dented, strewn with islands and winds in and out. It affords numerous roadsteads and places of refuge for war ships.



¶ We have examined it and experimented only too well during the war, when the Austrian fleet, secure in the natural shelters of the coast of Dalmatia was able to make a wide and facile use of submarines, and light vessels to obstruct navigation and fishing in the Adriatic, and to bombard the Italian coast cities without giving them a chance at self-defense. Dalmatia is to Italy what Belgium is to England, a bulwark in the hands of friends; but a continual menace in the hands of foes.

¶ To these political reasons, economical reasons should be added. I have said already that the coast cities, their trade and industries are all Italian. It is natural that the hinterland should gravitate toward Italy economically, and that, recognizing the Italian character of the centers of the coast, it is necessary to recognize as implicitly the Italian right to the rural zone behind them as far as the limits of the boundary fixed by nature.

¶ **Noblest Sign of Italian Title.** All these elements which bespeak the right of Italy to the country it liberated could be discussed altogether even if there were not another which constitutes in my opinion the noblest sign of the Italian character of those territories. That sign is the will of the peoples, expressed with ardent constancy through centuries of struggle, of suffering and martyrdom, stoically endured to vindicate the rights of their Italian nationality.

¶ The history of Dalmatia and Trieste attests that only one political and national conscience finds expression in either. It is Italian. I have asserted before that Trieste took part in the Lombard League in 1167 to resist the Emperor Barbarossa. Its ships, in fact, fought with those of Venice on Ascension Day in 1177 in the waters of Salvore, defeating the imperial fleet. Trieste on that account shared the benefits of the peace of Constance signed in 1183 between the emperors and the Italian cities of which it had been the faithful ally.

### **Trieste Always Italian.**

¶ Even when it ceased to be a free city, Trieste never hesitated to proclaim itself proudly Italian in the face of the



Austrian empire determined to nationalize it. In 1424, 1443, and in 1468, as a result, there were bloody conspiracies and insurrections in the beautiful Adriatic city. In turn history records movements, protests and declarations in support of the Italian character of Istria and Dalmatia in the years 1485, 1508, 1522, 1660, 1688, 1694, 1779 and 1797.

¶ When the great movement for the unification of Italy was instituted, Istrians and Dalmatians took a large part in the conspiracies and tentative insurrections of 1821, 1833, and 1844. In the wars for Italian freedom Istrians and Dalmatians volunteered in large numbers to fight Austria. We find them, in fact, on the battle fields of Lombardy and Piedmont in 1848, in the defense of the Roman Republic and of that of Venice in 1849; and in the campaigns of '59, of '60, of '66, of '67, and of '70.

¶ After that the struggle still continued. In 1879 a grave uprising against Austria occurred in Trieste. In 1882, William Oberdan was hanged for asserting the Italian preferences of Trieste. In 1897, in 1902, in 1903, and in 1908 impressive manifestations of Italians occurred in Istria and Dalmatia with a long drawn out series of trials, death sentences and their ghastly toll of horrors.

¶ When the world war broke out, Istrians, Dalmatians and Italians deserted the Austrian army in order not to fight under the flag of tyranny. They enlisted as volunteers in the Italian army as soon as Italy joined the conflict in May, 1915. Many of them fell in battle. Nazario Sauro, an Istrian was hanged before the eyes of his mother and sister. The same fate was meted out to the Dalmatian, Rismondo.

¶ This is the noblest sign, the sign traced in blood, the sacred sign that nobody and no sophism can wipe out, of the love of their mother country shown by the Italians of Istria and Dalmatia.

### Jugo-Slavs in the War.

¶ **What Did the Jugo-Slavs Do?** While the Italians subject to Austria so tenaciously and sacredly asserted their inalien-

able rights to nationality, and risked persecution, imprisonment, and the scaffold, or accepted death on the field of battle willingly, what were those races doing who are now disputing every right of Italy to Adriatic territory? I would not prejudice the question; but in view of the insolence of our opponents, it is necessary to set down that the Slovenes and the Croats were always—and especially in the last twenty years—the most faithful subjects of the Hapsburgs, who depended upon their loyalty without reserve.

¶ When the world war broke out they fought bitterly for Austria, and were careful not to follow the example of the Czecho-Slovaks and the Poles who turned their arms against their masters of the Dual Monarchy, taking advantage of the great cataclysm to hasten its dissolution and gain their liberty.

¶ Moreover the numerous Slovenes and Croats living abroad (here in America something is known of them) did nothing for the entente, and everything for the Central empires. Up to the last moment when Austria was already in collapse, the loyalty of the Slovenes and Croats to the empire was not one whit less. In the battle of the Piave fought last October, the Italian soldiers beside whom Americans were also fighting, were obliged to struggle terribly for seven days to break down the desperate resistance of the Austrian troops, among whom the Jugo-Slavs were foremost in their bitterness toward the foe.

¶ At present these same men claim for themselves the territory conquered by Italian arms, and defended by themselves on behalf of the Austrian Emperor. They shout against Italian imperialism because Italy is not willing that the long sacrifices of the Irredentists; and the thousands of her soldiers who were killed should serve only to satisfy the greed of those who gave their entire energies to support Austria to the last.

¶ **Italian Imperialism.** If there is any people which has a right to show its indignation when charged with imperialism, it is the Italian people. It recalls with pardonable pride that Italy went to war for the highest of patriotic ideals. It knows that the requests of Italy to have the Adriatic question settled are far more than myths. It does not ignore the fact that its

own government desires keenly to reach an understanding of a friendly nature with the Jugo Slavs. To that end it has lent every assistance to their cause, and made every concession in addition, consonant with its dignity and its own security as a nation.

¶ For that reason the Italian people are justified in considering the charges of imperialism raised against them as outrageous, especially when they are preferred by the very ones whose cupidity led them to demand besides Istria and Eastern Friuli, a part of Northern Italy to the very doors of Udine, where there is only the slightest trace of Slavism, and that quite Italianized in the midst of a population which is wholly Italian.

¶ In truth, Italian imperialism is one of the most extraordinary fictions the war has produced. It can be paired with the obstinacy of those who wished at any price to recognize in Austria a friend of the cause of the entente while Austria was the staunchest aid of Germany, and was fighting on all fronts side by side with the Germans, shouldering the greater and more direct responsibility for the war.

¶ For myself, let me say without hesitancy that if rapacious and unscrupulous imperialism has undertaken to make the solution of the Adriatic problem more difficult it is the imperialism of the Jugo-Slavs. It reveals itself in a typically brutal and threatening form, thus imposing on Italy as a duty certain extreme measures which otherwise might be left in abeyance.

### **Jugo Slavs Showed Bad Faith.**

¶ **The Italian Minorities in Dalmatia.** The Jugo-Slavs, in fact, after the violent measures they took in bad faith at Fiume and elsewhere, barely thought they had a free hand before they reached out to subdue and govern alien peoples, carrying on their propaganda by intrigues and much noise in Europe and America. Their audacious sophistry often concealed the real facts in order to influence popular opinion unfairly in foreign lands. With all their discussion they show themselves imbued with the Balkan theory which makes the affirmation of their



own nationality correspond with the suppression or violent absorption of that of any other people beside which they are living in the same territory.

¶ The terrible and harrowing changes witnessed in Macedonia, turned into a field for reciprocal destruction by the Bulgarians, Serbs, Greeks and Rumanians, each one of which denies the right of existence to the others, furnish a bloody example of the consequences which follow the Balkan conception of nationality. In view of such a spirit, can Italy light-heartedly abandon the Italians living in Dalmatia to nascent Jugo-Slavia? It would be tantamount to consigning them to certain and deliberate destruction.

¶ It may be said there is another side to the picture, since in any case a certain number of Jugo-Slavs would be entrusted to the government of Italy. Experience, however, shows that in reality, there could be no comparison between the condition of the Jugo-Slavs who would be made citizens of Italy, and that of the Italians who might become citizens of Jugo-Slavia. While the Balkan mentality expresses itself in the way seen in Macedonia, the Italian mentality, inheritor of the ancient wisdom and moderation of Rome, shows far more scrupulous respect for the minorities of other races who find themselves in Italian territory, as a result of the political exigencies which are imposed in order that the boundaries of a nation may not be made too illogical or insecure.

### Italy Always Lenient to Foreigners.

¶ Italy had, in fact, already before the war, the following inhabitants of other races: French, 83,000; Vaudois, 4,000; Bavarians, 6,000; Slovenes, 37,000; Serbs, 5,000; Albanians, 85,000; Greeks, 27,000; and Catalans, 12,000. Not only has Italy never attempted a violent or artificial denationalization of any of them, it has even given subsidies to their schools; and has permitted the language of the race to be used in the courts of first instance and the communal magistracies when all the parties involved required it.

¶ Moreover there never have been irredentist movements among any of them, since they happen only where the nationality of the minority in some way is denied.



¶ From this point of view accordingly, the problem seems clear; and the intemperance of the Jugo-Slavs prescribes precise duties on the part of Italy to defend the Italian character of Dalmatia. All of them might not be required, if the Jugo-Slavs should disclose a greater capacity to understand and respect the nationality and rights of others, and less cupidity for conquest.

¶ It is opportune to recall in this connection that the land-hunger of the Jugo-Slavs shows no indication that it will be satisfied, even by the appropriation of the territories which already belonged to Austria-Hungary, now liberated by the arms and valor of Italians. There are groups of Jugo-Slavs especially in America who push their pretensions even to Udine—the ultra-extremists go to the Piave—thus aiming at the possession of territory where the Slavs form a pitiful minority. In foreign lands they assert the principle that wherever a Jugo-Slav happens to live, there Jugo Slavia has a right to extend her territory. On this basis North America, which has not a few Jugo-Slavs, should form part of Jugo Slavia!

### Sophism Is Repeated Again.

¶ It seems necessary to repeat again near the close the curious sophism: The partisans of the Jugo-Slavs urge that it would be better for Italy to forego its rights to a few square miles of territory rather than the friendship of the Jugo-Slavs. It is easy to reply by transposing the proposition, since it seems that it would be far more to the advantage of Jugo-Slavia, poor and small, and hardly yet existent, to have the friendship of Italy, three or four times as large, than to have a little territory.

¶ However, the question should not be put in that way. All impartial persons will admit that it would be to the interest both of Italy and Jugo Slavia to find a common ground of equity on which they can agree, and eliminate their differences. This would not mean to deny Jugo-Slavia all essential rights. It would mean to make the Jugo-Slavs understand that certain compromises and renunciations on their part are indispensable not to conflict with the rights of Italy.

¶ This work so fruitful of good and of peace might be assisted effectively by the American people, since it does not drop its impartiality to reach a hasty judgment. The American people who have no interests either direct or indirect in the Adriatic sea, which would throw any suspicion on their opinion, are truly in a position to act as mediators through their President in a way that would smooth out the existing difficulties.

¶ In order that anything of the kind may take place, it is necessary that the American people should have exact and convincing information about the conditions of the controversy; so that it will not permit itself to be influenced by clamor coming from one side only, and will keep its calmness and poise.

¶ Above all one should not forget that Italy gave the world war a tremendous contribution of blood and of sacrifice, so that it may with the best of rights maintain that it saved the entente three times before the intervention of America. The first was by the declaration of neutrality which permitted France to withdraw the troops on the Alpine frontier and win the battle of the Marne in September, 1914. The second was by entering the war at a time when Russia was overthrown and in retreat, and the German-Austrian troops on the Eastern front might have been thrown against France. The third was by the desperate and victorious defense of the Piave last May, which signalized the initiative of the counter offensive of the allied nations against the Central empires.

### **Italy Made Early Victory Possible.**

¶ Italy, finally, through the defeat of the Austrians last October brought about the collapse of the last prop of German military power, and made a speedier termination of the war possible. Italy therefore has the right to gather the fruits of the cruel sacrifices she endured, that they may not pass into oblivion before the wordy exaggerations and unjust bellowing of a people who have among others the fault of forgetting that they owe to Italy, above all, their liberty. It follows that if Italy had not been victorious, Austria would still remain a power, stronger and more tyrannical than ever—and Jugo-Slavia would have been nothing more than an iridescent dream.





## Natural Watershed Boundaries of Italy.

A careful study of the topographical map on the preceding page after reading the descriptive matter below will give the observer a very clear conception of the justice of Italy's claims and the provisions of the pact of London.

### Italy Ready to Conciliate.

The Jugo-Slav element at Zagabria knows that Italy cannot renounce any more than it has done already. That is why it seeks to set the Serbs against Italy in the hope of creating discord among the allies.

Against the Jugo-Slavs' pretensions Italy has not taken any stand. It is ever animated by conciliatory sentiments. It stands for liberty, justice, and also for international friendships.

By the treaty of London Italy renounced vital parts of its territory to guarantee the Slavs access to the sea. By the pact of Rome of April last, in which representatives of all the Slav peoples took part, it reiterated its renunciations, and declared itself in favor of every reasonable concession to further the national aspirations of its new neighbors.

What then has given the Jugo-Slavs cause for alarm? Is it the occupation by Italy of the territory evacuated by Austria? If there were not more subtle reasons for this raising of the shields, the charge would seem puerile. The territory occupied by Italy is occupied in conformity with the decision of the Supreme Council of Versailles, with the consent of the delegates of all the allies including those of Serbia. If the Slovenes and Croats did not give their adherence, it is not Italy's fault. They were and still are by right and by fact enemies of Italy, and of its allies, including the United States and Serbia. As such they cannot look complacently upon the action of Italy, which is exactly like the occupation of the Rhine valley by the allies, and is for purely military objects.

### In Accordance with President's Ninth Point.

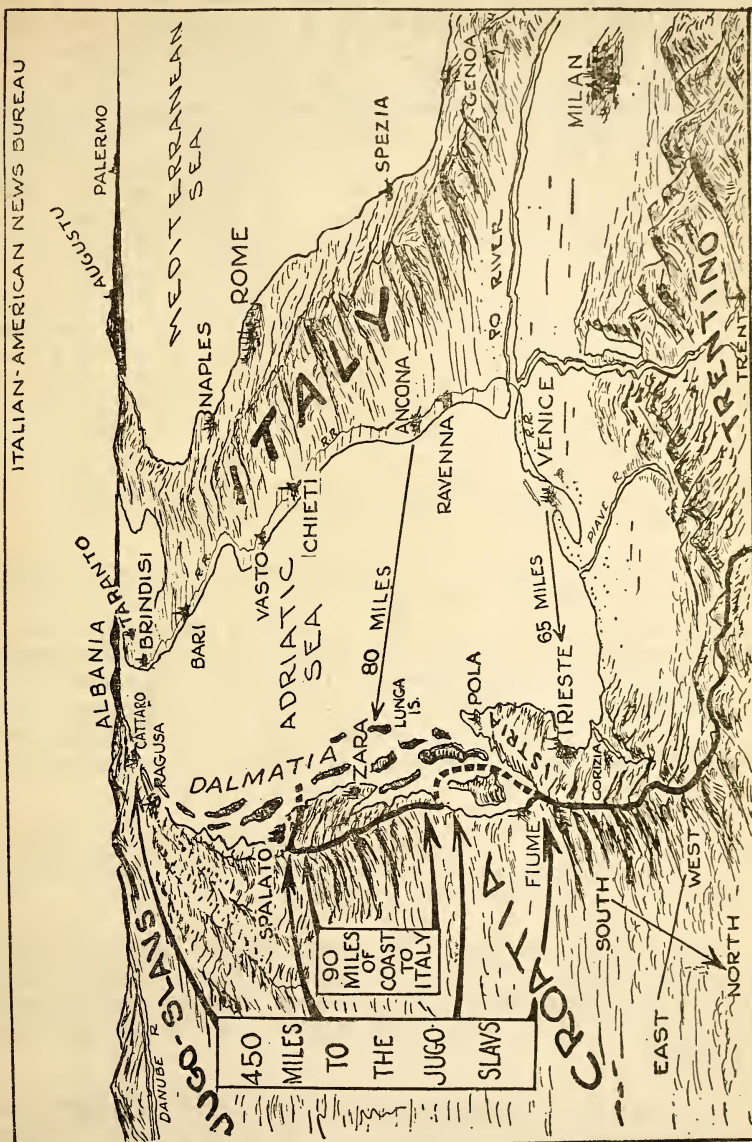
In spite of this peevishness Italy remains conciliatory. The fourteen points of President Wilson form the basis of Italian policies. They represent the humane ideals of the Italian people, always disposed to struggle with all its might for civilization and liberty. Italy accepts the American programme for the systemization of boundaries precisely because they correspond to its own ideals.

Examining the topographical map, it is clearly seen that the "lines of nationality easily recognized" which should circumscribe the Italian borders, and of which President Wilson speaks in his ninth point, conform with what Italy justly demands and with what has been guaranteed to Italy by the Treaty of London of 1915, a treaty which is not a "scrap of paper," but a sacred international contract, which, instead of consecrating Italy to imperialism, makes a renunciation of territory properly Italian in favor of the Slavs.

As the map shows, the natural borders of Italy, following the Italian national aspirations, stretch far outside the political borders demanded for Italy in the treaty of London. They are not only geographical lines. They are also the lines set by history, culture and ethnology. They are the lines of civilization which reveal the Italian character of those countries, some of which are now inhabited by Slav elements artificially brought there, although they never have been able to amalgamate with or absorb the Italian element.



# ITALY'S OPEN EASTERN COAST AND NEARNESS TO DALMATIA.



Italy Asks But 90 Miles of the Eastern Adriatic Coast—Concedes 450 to the Jugo-Slavs. (See next page.)

### Italy's Open Eastern Coast.

If one could stand upon the highest mountain of the Trentino and look down the long vista of the Adriatic it would be seen that Italy is situated much like the states of Illinois and Wisconsin on the west shore of Lake Michigan. The distance from Venice to Trieste is about the same distance as from Chicago across Lake Michigan to Michigan City. From Brindisi to Cattaro is a less distance. The border towns of the Trentino are in the same relation to those of Istria as are South Chicago and Hammond, Indiana. A glance at the map gives a very definite idea of the impossibility of defending the eastern coast of Italy. There are practically no harbors—none at all which can be used by deep water ships or which lend themselves to fortification. This coast is thickly settled, each town or village merging into the next. The railroad runs along the shore line of the Adriatic serving these towns and the settlements in the interior. All of Italy's naval bases are on the west shore line of Italy. She has none whatever on her Adriatic coast—it is entirely unprotected. Italy's three naval bases are shown on the map—Spezia, just below Genoa; Augusta, upon the south shore of Sicily, and Taranto in the heel of Italy.

While there is not a single military base upon Italy's Adriatic coast neither is there any harbor or inlet that can be transformed into one. In contrast to this, the opposite coast, only a few miles distant, held by Austria, has two enormously strong naval bases in Cattaro and Pola, while there are numerous harbors and islands that naturally lend themselves to fortification—two of these, Spalato and Zara especially lend themselves with very little work and expense to the strongest fortification.

From Ancona, an important east coast town, it is but 80 miles across to Zara, one of the finest harbors in the world and which can be made almost impregnable.

Italy is holding, under the terms of the armistice, only ninety miles of the eastern coast of the Adriatic with certain of the islands contiguous, while the so-called Jugo-Slavs have 450 miles of the Adriatic coast, with harbors and important ports and towns.

For many years Austria held command of the Adriatic, and through her occupancy of Dalmatia Italy's east coast has been subjected to constant menace. Having fought the great fight for Liberty in company with the enlightened nations of the earth she asks that she be not placed in such jeopardy again.



